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ABBÉ E. WETTERLÉ

Alsace and Lorraine
on
the Eve of Deliverance

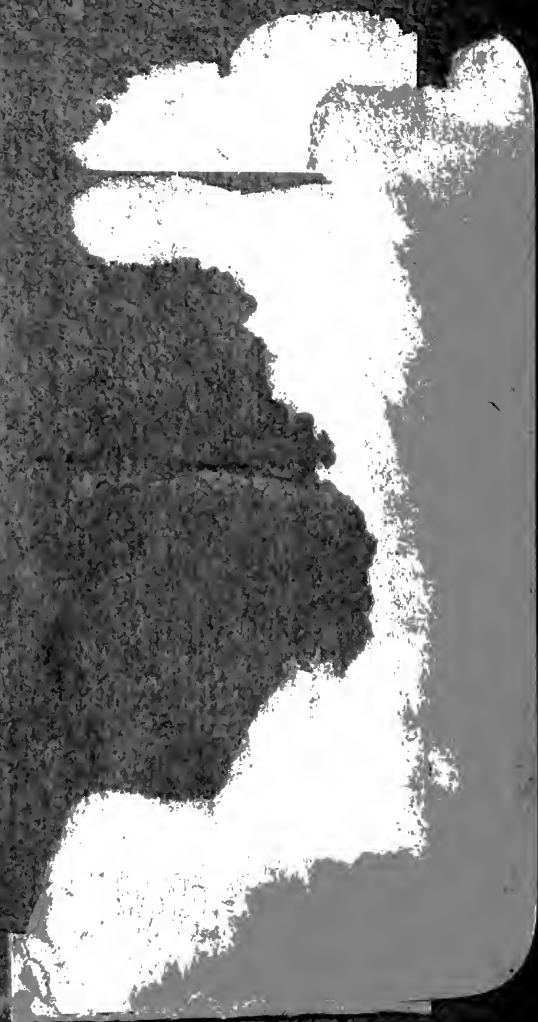


PARIS
IMPRIMERIE JEAN CUSSAC

40 — RUE DE REUILLY — 40

1917

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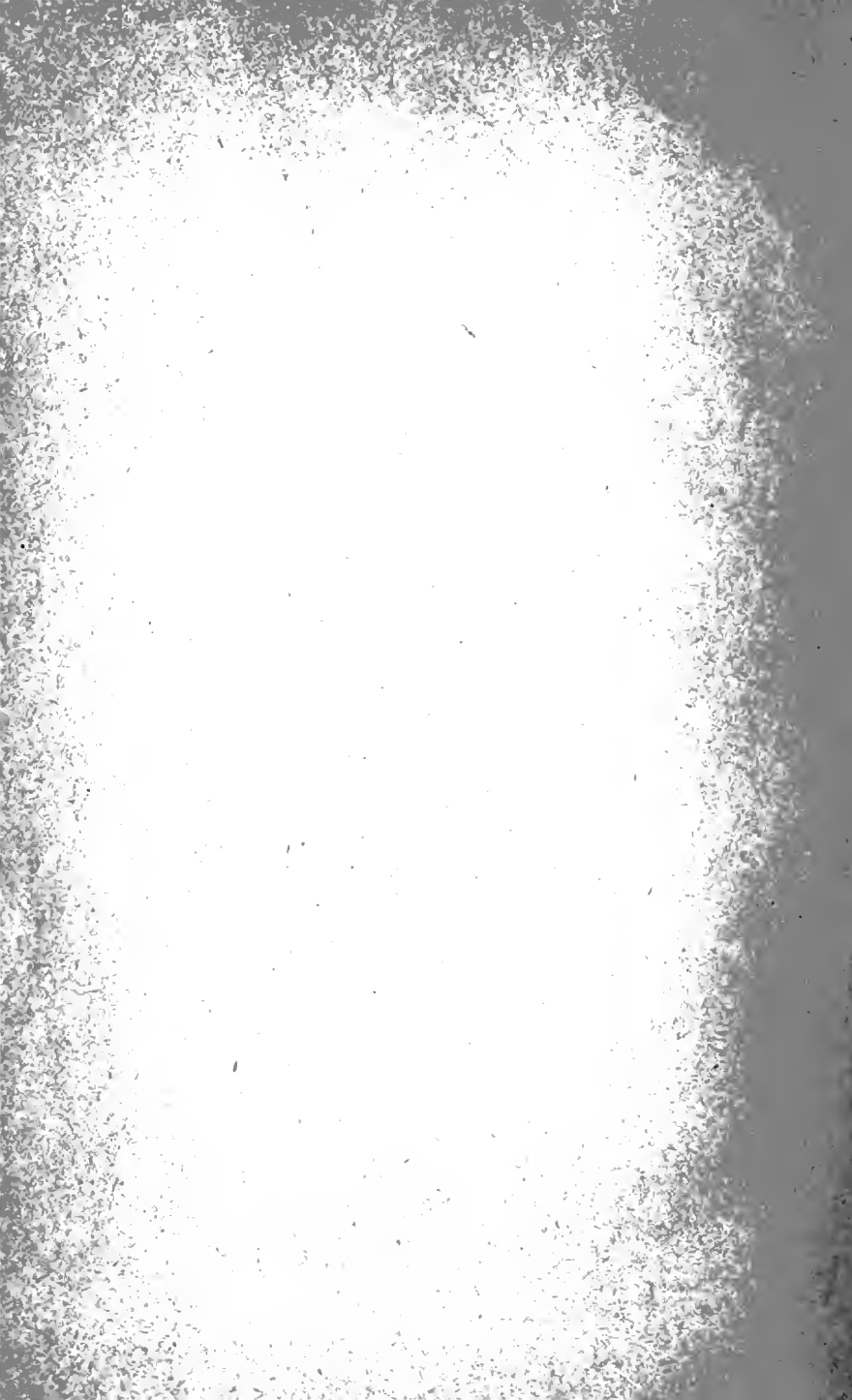


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ALSACE AND LORRAINE

on

the Eve of Deliverance



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It cannot be repeated too often: upstart Prussia, after rising from nothing, has succeeded, in the course of two centuries, in attaining to the foremost rank among the Great Powers, solely by the exercise of brute force. It was by right of conquest that she carried out every stage of her territorial aggrandisement. Silesia and Posen, the Rhine Provinces and Hanover, Schleswig-Holstein and Alsace-Lorraine are as many instances of lands wrested from their lawful owners by force of arms. Prussian hegemony in the German Empire was likewise the result of a successful war. No single province, no State ever gave itself to Prussia of its own free will. In one and all, the Hohenzollerns have had to appeal to the law of might for the purpose of establishing their domination.

Now in 1914, after long and careful preparation,

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Prussia believed that the time had come to complete her work of gradually monopolising the world's wealth. Fortunately the attempt did not lead to the expected results. Nay indeed, the aggressive policy of professional annexationists has produced a wide-spread reaction. Because the Imperial Chancellor had stated that to his mind treaties were but « scraps of paper »; because he had urged that « Necessity knows no law », England joined in the fray, and because Germany disregarding every international convention, practised her ruthless submarine warfare, the United States of America, believing in the sanctity of the plighted word, have asserted their will and determination to uphold the principle of nationalities.

And so it has happened that by their insensate attempt to enslave the world, the Germans have at last shown the necessity for a complete and final settlement in respect of their infringements upon the right of nations to dispose of their own selves. The case, at this juncture, is not that of a conflict between two rival powers only. Which of two opposite principles shall prevail — Might is Right, or the freedom of ethnical and national groups — such is the main question at issue in the present war, one of which a full and permanent solution will be supplied in the peace imposed by the Allies upon the Hun wreckers. Poles, Czechs and Moravians, Yugo-Slaves, Italians and Rumanians, after centuries of bondage, hail the coming dawn of their deliverance and look forward with enthusiasm to their recovered independence.

The Alsatians and Lorrainers are not the last

to rejoice over the undoing of their oppressors. For nearly half a century they had been waiting impatiently for the time to come when they should be restored to their mother-country. Bowed down under the heaviest yoke, they relinquished neither regret for the past, nor hope for the future. Their loyalty to France, momentarily absent from their midst, will find its due reward in the forthcoming vindication of their rights, shamelessly violated by an unmerciful conqueror.



It is interesting to note that Bismarck had foreseen how the annexation of our two provinces to the German Empire would stand in the way of any future *rapprochement* between France and Germany. The Prussian Staff, however, forced his hand. Von Moltke was resolved, come what might, to be constantly in a position to threaten Paris from behind the crest of the Vosges mountains and the bastions round Metz.

That which the Iron Chancellor had feared could not but come about : bruised and humiliated, France never forgot the mutilation of her territory ; and in the expectation of further demands and further aggression, she prepared not for a war of revenge, but for that war of self-defence with which, enlightened by previous disaster, she felt herself to be threatened. Germany, on her side, for the purpose of retaining her ill-gotten property, found herself compelled to ruinous armament. Each country without admitting the fact, looked

round for alliances, the main object of which was on the one side to perpetuate, on the other to redress the wrong inflicted. Thus it happened that the question of Alsace and Lorraine, though never alluded to openly, but ever present in the thoughts of all concerned, became from 1871 onwards the very pivot of the world's diplomatic activity.

The Germans, moreover, had never ceased to keep the agonising problem before the eyes of the public by the brutal methods practised in the administration of the annexed provinces. The very enumeration of the oppressive measures they inflicted upon Alsace and Lorraine would exceed the limits of such an article as this. We can but mention some of the most hateful, such as : the dictatorial powers conferred upon the governors, expulsions, the suppression of newspapers, the refusal of passports and *permis de séjour*, the prohibition of the teaching of the French language, the granting of administrative posts exclusively to immigrant Germans, the ruthless application of the ordinances relating to seditious shouts and emblems. Whole volumes could be filled with the tale of the long and grievous martyrdom of a population whose only crime was its determination to resist the process of germanisation and to remain true to its glorious past.

And because Germany was thus constantly abusing her power, the wail of the annexed provinces prevented France from losing sight of the wrong she had suffered in her dignity and in her wealth.

The Prussian military party had made yet ano-

ther mistake. Solely concerned with preparing for future wars, it had enforced the demand that in the German Confederation Alsace and Lorraine should form a province apart from the other States, thus remaining under the practically exclusive tutelage of the Northern Kingdom. Bismarck gave apt expression to this concern on the part of the General Staff, when he observed that Alsace and Lorraine were the « glacis », the military zone, of the Empire. When it is desired to form a reasoned judgment as regards the German policy in the annexed provinces, that saying of the Iron Chancellor's must always be borne in mind. It is the *leitmotiv* of all the barbarous legislation applied to the districts between the Vosges and the Rhine, from the early incidents accompanying the departure, in 1872, of those who had availed themselves of the privilege offered to them of remaining French, to the Zabern affair, which revealed to an astonished world both the tyranny of Prussian militarism and the marvellous endurance of its victims.

It would have been wiser statesmanship to have annexed the Haut-Rhin department to the Grand-Duchy of Baden, the Bas-Rhin to Bavaria, and Lorraine to Prussia. Thus separated from each other under different systems of legislation, and governed by officials having neither the same bringing-up nor the same ways, the Alsatians and Lorrainers would have found it almost impossible to co-ordinate their efforts, and their resistance to the methodical germanisation of their national life would have been lessened considerably. Fortunately for them, the military party thought other-

wise. It was chiefly concerned with organising the « glacis », in view of the conquests it already foresaw and longed for. And for the achievement of its ends to be unimpeded by the particularism of the several States, it was necessary that Alsace and Lorraine should be given a certain measure of autonomy under the sovereign power of the King of Prussia.

Bismarck, moreover, after a certain amount of hesitation, was fain to concur in an arrangement that enabled him, while ensuring the safety of the Empire, to render all the constituent States, as it were, accessories after the fact. By making Alsace and Lorraine the joint property of the Confederate Princes and by investing the Federal Council with full legislative powers therein, he secured the most effective and the most lasting support. The *Reichsland* became the symbol of German unity restored under the hegemony of Prussia. Any attempt upon it was an attack against the States as a whole, these having become the accomplices of a crime that was henceforth a collective one.

* *

Such was the chief factor that determined the evolution of the national status of Alsace and Lorraine, during the forty-four years that elapsed between the two wars. The history of the annexed provinces during those years may be divided into three sharply defined periods.

Down to 1879, Alsace and Lorraine possessed no rights whatever. The supreme power is vested

in the Kaiser, who makes over a portion of his sovereign prerogatives to a governor. A sort of enlarged General Council examines into the budget, but its provisions are voted by the *Reichstag*. The Governor is armed with dictatorial powers. He can, by a stroke of the pen, expel the natives, suppress the newspapers, dissolve all associations, and issue search warrants to be carried out either in the daytime or at night.

In 1879, the first attempt is made to establish constitutional law. A parliament is set up in Strasbourg, the members of which are elected for the one part by the Councils General of the three departments, for the other by the Municipal Councils of the four chief cities and by the delegates of the Municipal Councils of the remaining communes, in the proportion of one deputy for each political subdivision. The *Landesausschuss*, as this Assembly is denominated, votes the clauses of the budget and the laws of the country, introduced by the Governor, or *Statthalter*, on behalf of the Federal Council. The *Bundesrath* sanctions the laws promulgated by the Kaiser. At any moment the sovereign's delegate may intervene to suspend legislative action. He may also appeal, whenever he thinks fit, from the *Landesausschuss* to the *Reichstag*, which then sits as a special Chamber for Alsace and Lorraine.

In 1911, another transformation is accomplished. The Federal Council and the *Reichstag* are eliminated from the legislation of Alsace and Lorraine. Two Chambers are set up in the annexed provinces. The Lower of these is elected by universal suffrage,

the voting being personal, on the principle of one man, one vote, and registered by secret ballot. It comprises 60 members. The Upper Chamber, or Senate, consists for the one half of members appointed by the Kaiser for one legislative session only, for the other half of seven members in their own right (higher functionaries) and eleven senators elected by certain official corporations. The sovereign power is vested in the Kaiser, who appoints or dismisses at will the *Statthalter* and his ministerial colleagues, possesses an absolute right of *veto*, may in the event of a conflict between the Government and the Chambers suspend all legislative action and raise taxes or apply the public money to expenditure on the scale of the previous financial year, finally issue decrees that are law until such time as the Chambers are again assembled. This constitution moreover, is unstable to a degree, as it reposes upon a law of Empire that may be cancelled at any time, or altered by the *Bundesrath* and the *Reichstag* whenever they see fit.

It is to be observed that down to 1911 the *Statthalter* remained in possession of full dictatorial powers, so that Alsace and Lorraine were under martial law as laid down in France in 1894. When the Zabern incident revived all the old national opposition, Graf von Wedel bethought himself at one time of re-establishing the dictatorship. The publication, in advance, of the bill he had already laid before the Federal Council, fortunately prevented this plan from taking effect.

Until 1914, Alsace and Lorraine were still sub-

jected to special press legislation, contrary to the law of Empire. During the period of dictatorship, our newspapers, constantly threatened with arbitrary suppression, reflected public opinion but very imperfectly. Even when assured of continued existence, bail was required of them as a pledge of good behaviour. The authorities, moreover, could at any time prohibit the communication of matter to foreign newspapers.

The Constitution of 1911 was by no means a step forward in the matter of autonomy for Alsace and Lorraine. In France a favourable impression had been created by the establishment of our two Chambers, one of them elected by universal suffrage. People did not realise the import of the restrictions which, as a matter of fact, completely paralysed the activities of our parliament. The Alsatians and Lorrainers, on the other hand, were under no delusion in the matter, but justly considered the transformation of their constitutional dispositions as an obvious step backwards. This leads me to speak of the movement in favour of autonomy which has been so generally misunderstood outside our own little country.

* *

For some years after the annexation, the Alsatians and Lorrainers, thrown back upon themselves, steeped in the sorrows of separation, and looking forward to early deliverance, demanded nothing of their representatives but that they should carry to Berlin the expression of their protest

against the violence done to them. This was the so-called heroic period, which lasted down to 1887.

When after the septennial elections, the regime of ruthless repression was inaugurated in our provinces, when in Preiss's forcible language the « peace of the graveyard » reigned over the terrorised country, a change was made in the electoral platform. The Alsatians and Lorrainers, realising that open, violent protestation, such as they had hitherto indulged in, was barren of results and that they were merely playing into the hands of their oppressors, who made this a pretext for adding day by day to the weight of the yoke they bore, adopted a mean course, destined to permit the French elements in the annexed provinces to gain, within constitutional limits, a certain amount of liberty, to be put by them to the most judicious use, and at the same time to safeguard the historical traditions and the national aspirations of the native population.

Thus, in the course of time, did the autonomist party come into being, a party which was originally that of the *ralliés* (those won over to the German regime), but became later on that of the *protestataires* (or irreducible elements).

Abroad, there was a complete misapprehension as to the inward meaning of this purely apparent evolution. How often did I not hear superficial observers draw from it what were for us the most unexpected conclusions. « All that Alsace and Lorraine now ask for is an autonomy similar to that of other States in the German Confederation. They

will be perfectly satisfied with their lot as soon as this is granted to them. » Nothing could be more opposed to the truth, nor did the Germans, for all their lack of psychological insight, commit such an egregious blunder. They knew well enough that when we asked to be allowed to govern ourselves, it was solely with a view to escaping from the process of germanisation. Had they not been persuaded of this fact, they might indeed have made up their minds to loosen our bonds to some slight extent.

Our personal aim, in this struggle for autonomy, was to facilitate our own evolution. One of two things might thus be expected to happen : either the Empire, wishing to do away once for all with the question of Alsace and Lorraine, would allow us to form an independent State, in which case we would make use of our newly-acquired liberties to bind up the broken threads of our French traditions, or else it would persist in turning a deaf ear to our lawful claims, and then we should be able to make good use of that refusal for the purpose of keeping alive among our population a spirit of irreducible opposition, without transgressing the bounds of legality.

Our line of argument, therefore, was as follows :
 « You have made Germans of us, we would say to our masters, though you were quite aware of our attachment to France. The least we can expect is that you should grant us the same privileges as are enjoyed by the other parts of Germany. The Empire is a federation of States, each possessing the fullest measure of independence. Alsace and

Lorraine alone are the joint property of all the German Sovereigns. Such exceptional treatment can have no other meaning than the resolve to deal with us as Germans of an inferior class. So long as you do not grant us equal liberties with the rest, you must expect no change for the better in our feelings towards you. » Our position was unassailable. In their attempt to undermine it, the pangermanists could only rake up the time-worn Bismarckian theory of Alsace and Lorraine being the « glacis », the « military zone » of the Empire, greatly to the delight of our irreducibles, who turned all such declarations to account in fanning the smouldering discontent of their countrymen. In consequence of the position taken up by the autonomists, Germany thus found herself threatened by the two horns of a dilemma, each of which was equally dangerous for her : to grant to the annexed populations an independence she was well aware they would abuse, or to persist in withholding it, thereby increasing the hostility of the frontier provinces. Suffice it to say that the autonomist party, during the period from 1888 to 1914, never as a body accepted the accomplished fact, but merely took it into account, as a necessity from which there was no possible escape, in setting up on that untrustworthy foundation the edifice of their claims of the hour.

Another and more serious reason had led them to modify the purely negative political programme of the earlier protestators. Whether it pleased us or not, we belonged to a State organism, the inner legislation of which affected directly our

moral and material interests. It was to our advantage that our industry and our agriculture should receive due protection, that our social laws should be improved, our public liberties extended. Our electorate — labourers, artisans, tradesmen and manufacturers — had eventually begun to demand of their representatives that they should take a more active part in the framing of the laws of the Empire and more particularly of those governing Alsace and Lorraine. Nor was this anything but reasonable, for while ever looking forward to the distant future in the hope of deliverance, it was our duty to suit to our convenience the house we were compelled to live in.

It should be acknowledged, however, and I do so freely, that our autonomist claims were instrumental in bringing about certain lapses, some of which reached the point of complete betrayal. Whereas for the mass of our population autonomy was but a temporary solution, an expedient while waiting for better times, the *ralliés* attempted to make it the permanent formula of their national aspirations. A number of sensational interviews led foreign opinion entirely astray on this point.

In certain of these turn-coats, however, recent developments in the great war have wrought miraculous effects. I know of some — nor were they among the least conspicuous — who, after causing us untold vexation, year after year, by their zealous advocacy of germanism, are now equally loud in their protestations of love for France. For my own part, far from being revolted at this, I am

sincerely rejoiced, drawing as I do the most comforting conclusions from their sudden, if somewhat undignified conversion. Tertullian observed in his day that the human soul is naturally Christian. I would assert, similarly, that the soul of Alsace and Lorraine is naturally French. The *ralliés*, of whom Germany was so unduly proud, had therefore sided with her solely from motives of fear, or self-interest. As soon as French victories enabled them to shake off their weakness, their old subconscious native leanings asserted themselves once more.

Let me hasten to add, however, that the immense majority of my countrymen were not compelled to this tardy evolution, having at no time experienced such a fallingaway from grace.

The Germans, who were under no misapprehension respecting the autonomist movement, never ceased to call us *verkappte Protestler* (dissembling protestators). Throughout our electoral campaigns the official newspapers, or such Germans as attended our public meetings were always putting the same question to us :

« Do you accept the Treaty of Frankfort? »

Our answer, likewise, was ever the same :

« It is no business of ours, as individuals, to accept or to disown a treaty concluded without our being consulted, between the German Empire and the French Republic. That treaty made Germans of us, as we are but too well aware. Do you really wish to know whether the population of Alsace and Lorraine are satisfied with their change of nationality? Ascertain the nature of

their sentiments by a straightforward plebiscite. As to the future, it lies on the knees of the gods. We have not the power to fashion it to our liking ».

A point should here be made of the fact that even the candidates won over to the German regime carefully abstained from any allusion to the question of nationality in their addresses to the electorate, so certain were they of ignominious rejection, should they seek to obtain from the vote of the people the consecration of the occupation of their country. On the other hand, the opprobrious epithet of protestator, by the use of which the official press attempted to injure the candidates of the Opposition, proved their very best recommendation. It may therefore be asserted, without fear of contradiction, that the repressive policy inaugurated and carried out in Alsace and Lorraine, had led to purely negative results.



Nevertheless with their customary obtuseness, the professional would-be germanisers of the annexed provinces never wearied of repeating the time-worn arguments they considered likely to work upon the feelings of the « long-lost brothers ». On more than one occasion during the last few months, has a well known saying of Frederick the Great's been called to mind : « I begin by taking possession of a province ; pedants can always be found afterwards to prove that it was my perfect right ». That was the German way in Alsace and Lorraine. They first occupied the country, after

which they attempted to prove that our provinces belonged to them by ethnical and historical right.

How often has not the German press contended that the inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine are of German stock ! Nothing can be less true. The population of our provinces is Celto-Ligurian. The marked predominance of the brachycephalous skull, of black eyes and hair, together with the characteristic development of the chest, leave no possible doubt in the matter. A few German scholars have condescended to acknowledge as much. As for the Germanic patois spoken by a proportion of the natives, its use is explained by the historical evolution of the country. There was a time when the same dialect was spoken at Toul, at Verdun, at Montbeliard, the inhabitants of which have completely forgotten it, a proof that the language spoken cannot be adduced as an unfailing token of racial origin.

The historical argument, which the Germans put to such flagrant misuse, is equally unsound. Down to the treaty of Verdun, the Rhine was the natural frontier between Gaul and Germany. The fortuitous partition of the Empire of Charles the Great between his three heirs altered these conditions, yet the fact remains that the entire region west of the Rhine was Gallic. Argentoratum (Strasbourg), Noviamagus (Spire), Barbotomagus (Worms), Magentiacum (Maintz), Confluentes (Coblentz), Colonia Agrippina (Cologne), Aquae (Aachen), Colonia Augusta Trevirorum (Treves), are all towns the Roman, or latinised Gallic names of which point to the nationality of their founders or

early occupants. Were we then, in our turn, to apply the historical argument, we might just as easily assert France's right to territories extending far beyond the limits of Alsace and Lorraine.

Throughout the Middle Ages, moreover, the ties binding our provinces to the Holy Empire were of the loosest and most slender description.

Alsace, more especially, was by no means an Imperial, fief, Strasbourg was a State of itself; Mulhouse was bound up with Switzerland; ten free towns, Colmar, Turckheim, Munster, Kayserberg, Schlestadt, Obernai, Rixheim, Hagenau, Wissembourg, Landau, were confederated under a Republican constitution. In addition to this confederation and surrounding it, were a number of independent baronial estates. Abbeys with sovereign rights of their own, bailiwicks owing allegiance to the Duke of Wurttemberg or to the Bishop of Basle. All these small States paid, or were expected to pay dues to the Empire. The latter in return, provided very inadequate protection for regions that were so lukewarm in their attachment. As it happens, it was the withdrawal of the Imperial troops from Alsace during the Thirty Years' War that led the inhabitants of our province to solicit the intervention of France. As far back as 1635, by the treaty of Rueil, Colmar thus agreed to maintain a garrison of French troops, in return for the protection extended to it by the Bourbons.

I would call particular attention to the following circumstance. Down to the occupation of Alsace by France, that province, made up of minute particles of States, could have no concep-

tion of the solidarity of its population. There was no collective patriotism to be found in it. Divided the one against the other, and for ever quarrelling among themselves, the tiny principalities it comprised were bound together by no common feeling. Patriotism only came into being after the country had been united under one supreme authority. Now France it was that slowly but methodically carried out that unifying process, during the century following the treaty of Westphalia. To France went out the first manifestations of the general attachment of a population that owed to her the idea of a mother-country and a feeling of solidarity.

Is it necessary to recall the additional fact that the treaty of Westphalia (1648) was confirmed by the treaty of Nimeguen (1678) and that in 1879 the Marquis de Monclar, the King's high bailiff, received the oath of allegiance of the ten townships? The deed of cession was therefore perfectly in order. And conformable as it was to the express desire of the inhabitants of Alsace, German scholars are indeed ill-inspired in appealing to history as a justification of the outrage of which William the First and his accomplices were guilty, when against the will of the inhabitants they forcibly incorporated in their Empire a territory to which they had no manner of right.



Strangely enough, moreover, it is for the benefit of Prussia that the historical argument is thus put forward. Now the present German Empire, from

which Prussia expelled Austria in 1866, is by no means the heir to the Holy Empire, which latter laid claim to the ownership of Alsace-Lorraine. On no account, consequently, are the Hohenzollerns entitled to the possession of our provinces.

Nay further, the Prussians are not even of German stock. Brandenburg, the cradle of their monarchy was peopled by Wendes and Masurians. The Teutonic knights enforced their domination over these Slavonic tribes and made them into a people of warriors. I still remember the day when in the Reichstag, the Vice-President of the Chamber of Hesse, a bluff blue-eyed giant, pointing to the benches where sat the Prussian Junkers, observed to me with a disdainful curl of the lip :

« Those fellows, Germans? Nonsense ! They are germanised Slaves ! We, men of South Germany, are the real and only Germans. »

And he spoke but the truth. Of all the nationalities that go to make up the Empire, the Prussians are the least qualified to speak in the name of the German race. Neither by virtue of their origin, nor by the free consent of the peoples they have enslaved, can they prove their right to rule Germany as a whole, or their title to the inheritance of the old Emperors. They are merely attempting to fool us when they seek to justify their conquests by appealing to a community of race to which history gives the lie.



But what is the use of dwelling any longer upon these retrospective discussions. Let us consider the well-known, undeniable facts of the case. They will be amply sufficient to prove that France, when she takes back Alsace and Lorraine, will but recover her own.

On July 7th 1789, the citizens of Strasbourg sent an address to the States General, containing the following sentences :

« The citizens of Strasbourg, in the remotest part of the land, share in the general rejoicings over the binding together of the representatives of the French nation of all ranks, classes and dignities, into one body full of power and light. We and our children will rest at ease in the shade of that majestic tree that can but take on new life. »

Concurrently, the National Guard at Metz declare that « the new Constitution leaves no room for regret as regards the conditions obtaining heretofore under the Republic » ; but that on the contrary, « their fathers would no doubt be jealous of their felicity, were it possible for them to witness the same. »

Alsace and Lorraine joined enthusiastically in the wars of the Revolution and of the First Empire. Is it necessary to recall the names of Favert, Custine, Kleber, Richepanse, Lasalle, Kellermann, Ney, Lefèvre, Rapp, Eblé, Mouton? In every mansion, in every cottage of our provinces, are

stored up precious relics of the epic times of Napoleon.

Until 1870, Alsace and Lorraine shared all the destinies of France, for whom their population never ceased to show the deepest attachment. It would have come as a great surprise to our countrymen of the eastern provinces, had they been told at that time that they were of German stock, and that Germany held historical rights over their territory... What then, was the depth of their sorrow when they were apprised, after the « *Année terrible* » that they were to be the ransom of their stricken-down country !

Elections for the French National Assembly were held in 1871, in the invaded territories. By crushing majorities, the Alsatians and Lorrainers, though under the Prussian heel, returned the deputies whose task it would be to protest against the making over of their provinces to the enemy. There is no one to-day but is acquainted with the Declaration of Bordeaux, that tragic document which for forty-four years has remained the charter of the annexed populations. It behoves us nevertheless, to be constantly quoting its principal passages, those asserting the imprescriptible rights of France over the territories wrenched from her by violence :

« To witness whereof we proclaim before our French countrymen, before the Governments and peoples of the whole world that we hold as null and void, both now and in the time to come, any deed or treaty, any vote or plebiscite, sanctioning

the cession to a foreign country of all or part of our provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.

We hereby proclaim to be for ever inviolable the right of the Alsatians and Lorrainers to remain members of the French nation, and we swear and make oath, both for ourselves and for our constituents, for our children and for our children's children, to vindicate that right eternally, by every means and against every usurper. »

Let us observe, incidentally, that Keller, chosen by his colleagues to read out this proud declaration, objected beforehand to any kind of plebiscite, foreseeing that a time would come, no doubt, when the Germans, at grips with direct international difficulties might be tempted to organise a stage-managed appeal to the people, in order to make it appear that the annexed populations themselves concurred in the violation of right. And beforehand he reminded his hearers that no others had authority to voice their protest but those upon whom the outrage had been inflicted.

A few years later, the Alsatians and Lorrainers were called upon to elect their first representatives in the *Reichstag*. Again, what was the first action taken by the fifteen deputies of the annexed provinces? To protest, in terms both forcible and pathetic, the unrivalled dignity of which was but enhanced by the coarse laughter and unseemly interruptions of their German colleagues. Of this document I will, as before, quote but the most essential sentences :

« Your last war, having terminated to the advantage of your nation, gave you an undeniable

right to some measure of reparation. But Germany exceeded her right as a civilised nation, in enforcing upon conquered France the sacrifice of one million and a half of her children. In the name of the Alsatians and Lorrainers, sold into bondage by the treaty of Frankfort, we protest against the abuse of might from which our country has had to suffer.

« Would you adduce the regularity of the treaty sanctioning the cession to yourselves of our territory and its inhabitants? But reason, no less than the commonest principles of law, proclaims such a treaty to be invalid. Citizens possessed of a soul and intelligence are not a merchandise that can be bartered away, nor can it be lawful, therefore, to make them the subject of a contract. Besides, were it even to be admitted — as we certainly do not — that France had a right to make us over to you, the contract you confront us with is of no value. For a contract is binding only by virtue of the free consent of both contracting parties. Now it was with her throat under the sword that France, bleeding and exhausted, signed us away. She was not a free agent ; she bowed to violence, and our text-books are there to tell us that violence is a cause of nullity for such conventions as may be tainted therewith. » (Sitting of the *Reichstag*, February 18, 1874).

Here again, the problem is propounded in the clearest possible terms. The treaty of Frankfort can have no binding effect ; in the first place because the Alsatians and Lorrainers repudiate the bargain imposed upon them, and furthermore

because France did not sign that treaty of her own free will. The whole theory of the right of peoples to dispose of their own selves, a theory now advocated by all the Allied nations, is duly set forth in the declaration made by Teutsch and his colleagues.



Let us acknowledge that the Germans have eventually given up insisting upon their historical rights. In proportion as their ambitions developed, it became harder and harder to reconcile them with the teachings of history. So with matchless impudence they started a fresh doctrine : a prolific nation, especially when gifted with a genius for organisation, may and should overflow the boundaries within which it cannot breathe freely, for the purpose of developing the wealth that childless nations cannot be expected to work to full advantage.

It is in the name of this doctrine that Prussia to-day against every objection, claims the right, to remain in possession of the territories she acquired in 1871. And when I say Prussia, I mean *Preussen-Deutschland* as a whole. For their Socialists themselves, whether hailing from the North or South, put forward the same pretensions. This, indeed, is what we read in the papers from beyond the Rhine : « Had we not been provided with the iron from the Lorraine mines, we could not have held out for six months. The potash of Upper-Alsace is indispensable for our agriculture and for the manufacture of munitions. It is impossible

for us to give it up to our present enemies, and future rivals. And what would have become of us if we had been deprived of the Pechelbronn oil-fields? It was certainly not through love for the Alsatians and Lorrainers that we annexed their country. Nor shall we trouble to ask whether it suits them that we should keep it. »

This article of the *Rhenish and Westphalian Gazette* has at least the advantage of setting the problem in its true light. It supplies us with the key to the whole system of Prussian politics. The iron from the Briey basin would enable Germany to develop her metallurgical industry. *Therefore* the Germans had a right to seize upon it. The corn of Lithuania and Russian Poland is required to feed the subjects of William II. *Therefore* the Empire is perfectly entitled to secure it. This plunderer's argument is in constant use throughout the German Press. It is accessible to the meanest intelligence, which may account for the fact that not only the intellectuals, but likewise and more especially the popular masses have made it their own.

Alsace and Lorraine, it must be conceded, are a choice morsel. The iron deposits of the Thionville basin have supplied the Germans with 80 per cent of the cast-iron and steel whereof they have been so prodigal during the present war. The value of the potash deposits of the Haut-Rhin is estimated at between 1700 and 2550 millions sterling. Were it to be deprived of these huge resources, the German Empire would suffer a rapid decline in its industrial power. As to France,

those mines, under national control, would provide her with the means of retrieving a considerable part of her war expenditure.

Everything concurs, therefore, to justify the restitution to the mother-country of the provinces that were taken from her by force : the ethnical origin of the native population, the teachings of history, and national interest.



This fact the French popular mind has thoroughly grasped ever since the early days of the war. If some old-fashioned diplomatists still worry their heads over the clauses of the Treaty of Frankfurt, the people as a whole have looked upon that treaty as virtually abrogated since August 2nd 1914. France did not seek to precipitate the present conflict ; so far was she from desiring it, that it found her in a very imperfect state of preparedness, notwithstanding the ever-growing menace on her eastern frontier. But on the day when, for all her love of peace, she was compelled to draw the sword to repel a most brutal aggression, she threw off the shackles that had bound her limbs ever since the year of defeat. True she did not proclaim on the housetops that treaties are mere scraps of paper, but she no longer thought it incumbent upon her self to abide by those her enemy had himself torn to shreds.

Consequently, no later than the month of September 1914, the French Commander-in-Chief, addressing the mayors of the Alsatian communes

occupied by the French troops, went so far as to say : « You are French now and forever. » And a few weeks later the President of the Republic made use of the same words. Both for the soldiers at the front, and for the civilians behind the lines, peace with Germany will only be possible after the restitution of Alsace and Lorraine to France, the Alsace and Lorraine of 1792, be it said by the way, not those of 1871, for eighty years of serfdom more or less are of no account in the life of nations, nor can the lapse of time serve to legalise thefts committed collectively.

Public opinion in this respect has found vent in countless manifestations. I will only refer to the order of the day voted by the French Chamber last June, after several lengthy secret sittings, by 454 votes as against 55 :

« The Chamber of Deputies, as the direct expression of the sovereignty of the French nation, sends its greetings to the Russian democracy and to the Allied democracies. Backing up the unanimous protest made in 1871 before the National Assembly by the representatives of Alsace and Lorraine, torn from France against their will, it declares that it expects as a consequence of the war inflicted upon Europe by the aggression of Imperialistic Germany, besides the liberation of the invaded territories, the restitution of Alsace and Lorraine to the mother-country, and due reparation for the damage committed. Disclaiming any desire for the conquest or subjugation of foreign populations, it trusts that the joint exertions of the armies of the Republic and of the Allied

armies will lead, after the overthrow of Prussian militarism, to the establishment of lasting guarantees of peace and independence for all nations, great and small, by the organisation as already mapped out of a league of nations. Trusting to the Government to achieve the above results by the co-ordinate military and diplomatic action of all the Allies, it rejects every amendment and proceeds with the business on the paper. »

This order of the day, confirmed by that of the Senate, found a striking echo in the speech delivered by the Prime Minister, M. Ribot, at the Franco-American banquet of July 4, 1917, and containing the following words :

« At the same time as they (the United States) decided to join in the struggle, they laid down through the intermediary of their President the conditions on which peace will be signed, and in consequence a complete agreement was reached between us forthwith. In respect of the question of Alsace and Lorraine which we have so much at heart, the United States have understood that no sophistry can avail to prevent us from claiming back the property that was snatched from us by an abuse of force and that no *consultation is required* to entitle us to satisfaction in the matter. The protest of the representatives of the provinces torn from France rings as loud to-day as forty-five years ago. And so the case can have but one ending. »



Nor was this declaration superfluous. Indeed, a small band of nebulous theorists of pacifism had rallied, during the past few weeks, to the proposal of a plebiscite as a previous condition of the restitution of Alsace and Lorraine to France. Not but what they themselves acknowledged the difficulties they would have to contend with in carrying such a plan into effect.

Who would be the electors authorised to take part in this consultation of the people? Were the immigrant Germans settled in the annexed provinces to be given votes, just as if they were natives of the country? They form about one-fifth of the population, 400.000 as against 1.800.000 natives. Again, would it not be common fairness to solicit the votes of the Alsatians and Lorrainers who had, so to speak, recorded their opinion beforehand by emigrating in order to escape from the German yoke? Now these friends of France, who formerly gave up everything, their fortunes, their situations, their ties of family and friendship, for the sake of patriotism, are to be reckoned by hundreds of thousands. Two hundred thousand Alsatians and Lorrainers left the country before December 31, 1872. Nor had the process of emigration ever come to an end since that time, as witness the thousands of sentences passed every year by the courts of Alsace and Lorraine upon those who evaded their military duties by taking refuge abroad.

Again, who would supervise the operations of the plebiscite? Could the measure be carried out in all fairness under German control? Assuredly not. Already the germanising agents are at work, employing their customary methods in order to vitiate the results of that consultation of the people which they look forward to as their last resource. The hostages taken in 1914 are authorised to return to Alsace and Lorraine; the semi-official press is at great pains to demonstrate that the annexed provinces have no commercial or industrial relations outside the Empire, that any sudden upheaval of economic conditions would be attended by disastrous effects for the country. Furthermore, the German papers insinuate that the Alsatians and Lorrainers who have been compelled to serve in the Imperial armies, during the war, would be held in constant suspicion if their provinces were to revert to their former mother-country, while the mutilated and the dependents of the missing would receive no pensions.

On the other hand, were the plebiscite to be held after the restitution of Alsace and Lorraine to France, the Germans would look upon it as null and void, and accuse the liberators of the country of putting unfair pressure upon the late-annexed inhabitants.

These considerations, however, are but of secondary importance. The crux of the question is the necessity of repairing the injustice committed in 1871. A million and a half of Frenchmen were then deprived of their rightful nationality in defiance of their express desire. Vanquished France

was compelled at the point of the sword to consent to the taking from her of territory that had been hers for more than two hundred years. The Germans failed to consult the population officially, either before the annexation or during the forty-four years that have elapsed since. The loyalty of the Alsatians and Lorrainers to France has asserted itself repeatedly and in the most unequivocal manner, in spite of ruthless persecution. Yet it is proposed to put upon France, to put upon ourselves the humiliation of a popular consultation, before due redress can be obtained ! To give annexationist Germany, who refuses to recognise the right to existence of peoples too weak to protect themselves, the flattering satisfaction of being deprived of the fruit of her robberies only after a consultation of her victims ! Why, this would amount to a justification after the event, of the violation of international law of which she was guilty in the days gone by, to a recognition of the validity of her title-deeds, at least for the time being !

The theorists of pacifism have a strange way, forsooth, of asserting their principles, which they air exclusively for the benefit of the nation that has repeatedly and deliberately violated them. Their chief concern would appear to be to mount guard over ill-gotten goods, hedging around the lawful and necessary restitution thereof with a number of formalities, from which the robbers alone could derive some advantage.

France must take back her own property, the Alsatians and Lorrainers must return to their lost

mother-country. There is not another word to be added. The reversion of our provinces to the national territory will be invested with its full moral significance only if it takes place in a simple normal fashion, as the logical outcome of events.

Alsace-Lorraine in the grasp of Germany means our frontier lying open and the way to Paris clear, it is the constant assertion of the right of the stronger, the symbol of that artificial unity of the German Empire standing as a perpetual menace over the weak; it has meant Europe in arms for the last fifty years. This it is that must be borne in mind when approaching a problem, in the solution of which all the Allied nations are concerned to a like degree.



A German newspaper, the *Freie Zeitung*, edited by democrats of the old school who have taken refuge in Switzerland, has published a number of interesting articles on the subject of Alsace and Lorraine. The conclusions arrived at are the following :

« It has therefore been shown :

« 1° That Alsace and Lorraine were not filched by France. They were transmitted, like so many other lands, from one dynasty to another, at a time when such a proceeding appeared perfectly natural, in the same way for instance, as Ticino was given to Switzerland. In those good old times, people changed their nationality more readily than their body-linen;

« 2° As regards racial origin, Alsace cannot be

said to belong to either country (?), for at the present time there are no pure and unmixed races in any civilised land, least of all in Alsace. Moreover the question of race plays no part in the political destinies of a country, the example of Switzerland being a case in point;

« 3° From the linguistic point of view, Alsace is peculiarly situated. Just as the Alsatian is obliged to learn High German before he can speak it, so he will have to learn French, in order to be able to rise, as he did formerly, to the highest administrative and military dignities. The question of language likewise plays no part in the political destinies of a country, and here again we will quote the example of Switzerland;

« 4° Alsace lived with, and in France in the days of the proclamation of the Rights of Man, and profited thereby. In consequence, it became part and parcel of that country. The hearts of its inhabitants have become entirely French, for the very reason that to be French means to enjoy liberty, democracy and unrestricted human dignity;

« 5° The annexation of Alsace by Germany, in 1871, was a flagrant violation of the Rights of Man by a dynasty that have always shown the greatest reluctance in granting such rights to their own people;

« 6° The population of Alsace desire to recover their freedom. That freedom they will find only where they were born, not where they have always been placed under restraint. They wish to revert to the mother-country, to beautiful, kindly France.

Gladly will they turn their backs on the Sovereign and on the people who have always acted like lords and masters in Alsace. »

It was of interest to quote this curious article, though a few Germans who have shaken off their allegiance are the only ones to speak after this fashion to-day, who can tell but what, after the overthrow of the Hohenzollerns and the Prussian Junkers, the old Republicans of 1848, freed at last of the pangermanic obsession, will shortly utter the same sentiments?

Meantime, neither official Germany, nor the many and diverse political fractions of the *Reichstag* have reached such a judicial conception of the rights of the Alsatians and Lorrainers. Far from this being the case, disconcerted by the evergrowing hostility of a population whose resistance exceptional legislation and the most oppressive measures have been powerless to overcome, Germans of every party loudly proclaim that when the war has been brought to a successful issue, the question of Alsace and Lorraine will have to be settled once for all by the splitting up of the three departments and their incorporation into the neighbouring German States. Furthermore, part of the population must be deported to provinces beyond the Rhine. Lastly it will be necessary, for some years to come, to send the children of the annexed provinces to schools in Germany proper, in order to give them a more thoroughly patriotic education.

Such schemes as these were widely propounded in the papers of every shade of opinion, nay even in the democratic press, until a few short weeks

ago. They are not alluded to so frequently since the idea of a plebiscite has come into favour ; but the Alsatians and Lorrainers know full well that the Imperial Government will revert to them as soon as ever it considers itself to be in a position to carry them into effect.



Are they not obsessed by burning memories of the hateful persecution to which they have been subjected by the German military authorities, ever since the war broke out? On the very morrow of the Zabern incident, the Prefect of Police at Berlin wrote in a letter that was made public at the time : « Officers quartered in the *Reichsland* have all the impression of camping in enemy country. » We find the same idea expressed in the general orders given out in the month of August 1914, to the troops from Baden. » You are proceeding into enemy country (Alsace) and you will treat the inhabitants accordingly. » A few months later, General Gaede, addressing his troops at Kayserberg, said to them : « The country is pleasant enough, but its population must be destroyed (*aber die Bevölkerung muss vernichtet werden*).

The very day after a state of war was proclaimed, several thousand peaceful citizens were arrested in Alsace and Lorraine ; they were imprisoned, ill-treated, deported beyond the Rhine, and interned in certain towns of the central and northern provinces. In the course of two years, the military courts-martial dealt out terms of imprisonment

aggregating 3000 years to the annexed natives guilty of having expressed Francophile sentiments. The number of those under sentence is at times so great that the prisons are too small to hold them. They must await their turn of imprisonment in what the natives jokingly speak of as the « Hôtel de France ». Death-warrants are delivered and carried out after summary trials.

The villages of Bruzwiller and Sewen are burned to the ground. It is strictly forbidden to speak French in the streets. A mere « bonjour » is punished with a week's imprisonment. Youths of fifteen are mobilised to labour in the trenches. Nowhere is the requisition of foodstuffs enforced more harshly. Thousands of people are denationalised that the Exchequer may sequesterate their property. Such Alsatians and Lorrainers as have found refuge in Switzerland, be they never so old or so impotent, are ordered to come back, on pain of having their property confiscated ; for confiscation it is, in sober truth, the sequestrators being instructed to sell all stocks and shares, and apply the proceeds, without further ado, to the purchase of War Loan bonds. All the artistic treasures of the country are removed to Germany, the same being done with all the plant belonging to native factories. Thus, the machinery of the important metallurgical establishments of Mulhouse (workshops for the construction of mechanical appliances) are sent to Munich. All the church-bells are broken up and taken to the war factories. It looks, indeed, as if Prussia is determined to carry out the threat uttered by William II : « If ever I am

obliged to give back Alsace and Lorraine to France, I will leave them as bare as my hand (*kahl wie die Hand*).

In presence of all these outrages, what is the attitude of the persecuted? They remain silent, but again they bind themselves together more closely to organise passive resistance. Every party quarrel is hushed : the victims of German savagery stand shoulder to shoulder . The *Strassburger Post* acknowledges as much. Even the younger men, « moulded in the Academies », who have everything to lose by a change of nationality, make no attempt to hide their French sympathies. The *Frankfurter Gazette* likewise proclaims the complete failure of the germanising process. The *Kölner Volkszeitung*, the prominent Roman Catholic organ, accepts, nay demands, the dismemberment of the *Reichsland*. The pangermanic press goes farther yet : no repressive measures will ever be sufficiently hard to punish the rebels who presume to raise their heads after forty-four years of serfdom.

Before the opening of the last session of the parliament of Alsace and Lorraine, the Chancellor comes from Strasbourg. It is essential that the two Chambers shall proclaim their attachment to the Empire. Sudekum, the Socialist upholder of the Government, attends upon Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg. His task will be to win over the eleven deputies of the Extreme-Left. The Presidents of the two Assemblies, the traitor Ricklin and that turncoat of the first hour, Hoeffel, are persuaded to deliver speeches which will be a shameful blot

on their parliamentary career, already marked by so many blemishes. What is the result? While they are speaking, the Houses are emptied. They are left to address the bare benches. The two Bishops of Strasbourg and Metz, Germans though they be, refuse to declare that those under their jurisdiction are firmly desirous of remaining subjects of the Empire. Their conscience forbids them to utter such a lie. Once again the gross trick, contrived by the Berlin stage-managers, leads to purely negative results.

And while, beyond the firing-line, the civilians are giving such striking proof of their attachment to France, 20,000 young men, who had succeeded in crossing the frontier before the outbreak of hostilities, or have deserted from the German army, are serving as volunteers under the Republican flag. The Germans are mistrustful of those who, unprepared for the turn of events, have found themselves compelled to don the hated uniform. Orders are given by the Generals on no account to admit them to posts of confidence. After a very short time, they are no long dispatched to the French front, where they both seek and find too many opportunities of desertion. Their commanding officers on the Eastern front are instructed to keep them ever in the van, and when they are likely to be attacked, they are carefully watched, to prevent them from crossing over to the enemy.



Such are Alsace and Lorraine, which for so many years have never weakened in their resistance.

That admirable people will never be looked up to sufficiently. To them, to them alone, the nameless many whose sufferings will never be recorded, whose heroism will be rewarded by no paeans of individual praise, do I ask my French countrymen to grant a tribute of grateful admiration. I have seen them at work, I have personally been able to appreciate the delicacy of their minds and hearts and I am doing them but bare justice when I say : The people of Alsace and Lorraine, taken collectively, have performed more than their representatives promised in their name, when with a heavy heart they bowed to the inevitable in 1871. In the face of the direst persecution, they have remained, as they had been for two centuries, the staunchest, the most determined champions of the French ideal.

Undiscouraged by repeated disappointments, they possessed their souls in patience, waiting for the hour marked by Providence for their liberation. They knew that violated right would be vindicated sooner or later, and it was their heart's desire that France, when they reverted to her, should find her long-lost children devoted and trustful as ever, filled with exclusive love for their true, their only mother-country.

The feelings of the Alsatians and Lorrainers will be revealed openly, as soon as the Germans can no

longer stifle the expression thereof under the bushel of their tyranny. And it will then come as a joyful surprise to France to realise that fifty years' absence have wrought no change in the hearts of the exiles, nay that their love for the old country has but grown and become refined in the fiery furnace of long and painful suffering.

The dawn of the blessed day of deliverance is breaking over the horizon. Germany, in her insensate megalomania, has let loose upon the world a war of conquest, that has become for France a war of requital. A short while ago Alsace and Lorraine found comfort in distant hopes. To-day, it is with perfect trust and confidence in the certainty of permanent liberation that they look forward to the speedy coming of their deliverers. Proud and happy, even to intoxication, they take up the threads of their history, roughly severed by the events that doomed them to be the ransom of their dearly beloved country. The prophetic declaration of Bordeaux, that draft upon the Bank of the Future, issued by Keller, Grosjean and their gallant comrades, is falling due. The steadfast trust of the annexed populations shall not be disappointed. Nor will France, you may take my word for it, suffer disappointment either, for in her recovered provinces she will find awaiting her, joyous and determined, the sons of those who on the morrow of defeat proclaimed « for ever inviolable the right of the Alsatians and Lorrainers to remain members of the French family ! »

E. WETTERLÉ.

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